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Letters to the Editor

Access to Defense Data

In your story "Pentagon Says New Security Measures to Deter Espionage, but Critics See Watchdogs as Target" (back page, Jan. 15), it is apparent your reporter didn't read the new directives on release of export-controlled technical data and use of the polygraph.

If he had, it is difficult to see how he could write that the technical-data regulation will be used to keep test and evaluation data from being disseminated "to anyone outside the Pentagon." The directive states that it shall not be used "to withhold from public disclosure unclassified information regarding DoD operations, policies, activities, or programs, including the costs and evaluations of performance and reliability of military and space equipment." It further states that it shall not be used "to deny access to technical data [subject to the directive] to the Congress, or any federal, state or local governmental purposes." Indeed, the new directive provides clear and simplified procedures for virtually any U.S. citizen to obtain data for a legitimate purpose. It is hoped that the new directive will actually facilitate the flow of critical technical data to those in the U.S. who need it, while limiting the currently uninhibited access of adversaries.

A similar point might be made concerning the polygraph directive. Although you seem intent to portray the new policy as an attempt to stop "leaks" of classified information to the press, the new policy does not change previous policy one iota in terms of using the polygraph to investigate such disclosures. DoD has always possessed this authority, although it has been infrequently used. If an employee does not wish to take an examination as part of the "leak" investigation, no legal or administrative action may be taken against him. Alternatively, if he takes the polygraph and deception is indicated, it alone cannot provide the basis for any action. Again, these are longstanding policies that remain in effect.

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